INTRODUCTION TO HOSEA

I. NAME OF THE BOOK

A. It is named after the main speaker, Hosea.

B. His name means "salvation" (BDB 448). It was originally Joshua's name (cf. Num. 13:16). It is the same name as Hoshea (2 Kgs. 17:1).

II. CANONIZATION

A. This book is part of the "latter prophets" (Ecclesiasticus 49:10).

B. It is the first of the Twelve, a grouping of minor prophets (*Baba Bathra* 14b).
1. Like the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, these twelve smaller books fit on one scroll.
2. Their order reflects the traditional view of each book's chronology.

C. The order of "the Twelve" or Minor Prophets has been linked by many scholars to a chronological sequence. However, there are problems with this view:
1. The first six books are different between the MT (Hebrew text) and LXX (Greek text).

MT	**LXX**
Hosea	Hosea
Joel	Amos
Amos	Micah
Obadiah	Joel
Jonah	Obadiah
Micah	Jonah

2. Internal evidence puts Amos chronologically before Hosea.
3. Hosea is probably listed first because of its length and eighth century setting.

D. The text of Hosea is probably the most difficult of any OT book (cf. IX and NET Bible, p. 1557, #1).
1. Part of this is due to the poetic and emotional nature of the book.
2. Part is due to scribal copying. The MT and the LXX are different.
3. Part is due to the differences in the spoken Hebrew between Israel and Judah.

III. GENRE

A. The book is a mixture of prose and poetry (mostly poetry).

B. Hos. 1 and 3 are historical narrative of the life and times of Hosea, while chapter 2 is poetry.

C. Hosea's life and marriage were used in an analogous way to demonstrate the waywardness of Israel and the steadfast, intimately personal love of YHWH.

1. YHWH as faithful young lover (Hos. 1-3)
2. YHWH as loving parent (Hos. 11)
3. These metaphors were based on the Israeli confusion of Ba'al as "husband" and "lord" instead of YHWH.

D. It is written in beautiful, powerful, and emotional poetry, but in disjoined units (Hos. 4-14). Hosea's writings and prophecies may have been collected and edited after his death.

E. David A. Hubbard, Hosea (Tyndale OT Commentaries), characterizes the genre when he states:

> "It is that profound pathos, let loose towards Israel in speech after speech, irony after irony, metaphor after metaphor, question after question, which gives the book its fire" (p. 20).

F. There are several views about the Prophet's marriage.
1. hypothetical (allegorical)
2. spiritual infidelity (typological of Israel's idolatry)
3. real marriage to a non-virgin (ritual fertility worship)
4. real marriage to a wife who later became involved in ritual fertility worship (literal)

For me, #3 fits all the known information best.

IV. AUTHORSHIP

A. The consensus has always been Hosea himself, although we know little about him.

B. The man:
1. son of Beeri (Hos. 1:1)
2. a citizen of Israel (Hos. 7:5), but which city is unknown
3. as Amos spoke of the need for a social justice, Hosea spoke of the need for covenant fidelity
4. he has been called
   a. "the Jeremiah of Israel"
   b. "the Apostle John of the OT"
   c. "Israel's first evangelist"

C. *Baba Bathra* 15a said the men of the Great Synagogue wrote "the Twelve." This must be in the sense of compiled or edited.

D. Some have questioned his authorship because
1. of the references to Judah, Hos. 1:1,7,11; 4:15; 5:5,10,12-14; 6:4,11; 8:14; 10:11; 11:12; 12:2
2. of the passages of future prosperity and deliverance
3. Hosea's marriage is described in third person in chapters one and two, but second person in chapter three

E. Answers to objections.
1. All the prophets view the split between Israel and Judah as wrong. Judah is always seen as the legitimate heir of the covenant promises to Abraham and David.
2. The prophet often intersperses judgment and promise oracles. They go together as one divine message.
3. Hosea may be a collection of his sermons and poems.

V. DATE

A. Hosea is an eighth century B.C. prophet
1. Isaiah and Micah spoke in Judah
2. Jonah, Amos, and Hosea spoke in Israel

B. Hosea followed and overlapped the ministry of Amos

C. The date (see chart of the kings of the divided monarchy in Appendix) of his preaching would have been to the days of the kings mentioned in Hos. 1:1.
1. Uzziah (of Judah)
2. Jotham (of Judah)
3. Ahaz (of Judah)
4. Hezekiah (of Judah)
5. Jeroboam II (of Israel)

There are several scholarly suggestions (the differences are caused by Pekah's 30 year reign, cf. 2 Kgs. 15:27. For a good brief answer see Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, pp. 209-211):
1. Keil, 790-725 B.C.
   a. Hos. 1:4, started before fall of Jehu dynasty
   b. Hos. 10:14, present at Shalmaneser V invasion
2. Francisco, 750-735 B.C.
   a. a little later than Amos
   b. last days of Jeroboam II
   c. not later than 735 B.C. because Assyria took the area of Gilead
3. Harrison, 753 to just before 722 B.C.
   a. Jeroboam II dies in 753 B.C.
   b. tribute paid by Menahem to Tiglath-pileser III (8:9) about 739 B.C.
   c. events of Syro-Ephramatic War of 735-734 B.C. referred to in Hos. 5:8-6:6 (also Isa. 7-14).
   d. days of Hosea explain references to Egypt in Hos. 7:11; 9:6, and 12:2.
4. La Sor, Hubbard, and Bush, 753 - til after 722 B.C.
   a. started before Jeroboam II's death, 753 B.C.
   b. extend to Hezekiah's reign
   c. co-regent from 728 B.C.
   d. king from 715 B.C.
   e. preached during Tiglath-pileser III's reign, 745-727 B.C.

VI. HISTORICAL SETTING - See Introduction to Amos. VI.

VII.LITERARY UNITS

A. (Taken from Introduction to the OT by Clyde Francisco, pp. 150-163)
1. Introduction, Hos. 1:1
2. Hosea's Domestic Crisis, Hos. 1:2-3:5
3. God's Controversy with Israel, Hos. 4:1-10:15
4. The Father and His Wayward Son, Hos. 11:1-12
5. What is in a Name (Jacob vs. Israel) Hos. 12:1-15
6. Death of a Nation, Hos. 13:1-16
7. Alternative to Judgment Hos. 14:1-9

B. (Taken from Introduction to the OT by E. J. Young, pp. 252-254)
1. God's Relations with His People, Hos. 1:1-3:5
2. Various Discourses of the Prophet, Hos. 4:1-14:9
   a. The Guilt of the Northern Tribes, Hos. 4-8

b. The Punishment of the Northern Tribes, Hos. 9:1-11:11
c. The Future Blessings for a Repentant People, Hos. 11:12-14:9

VIII. MAIN TRUTHS

A. YHWH is a personal God. Sin is against a loving God (Hosea), not just a violation of covenant rules (Amos).

B. Biblical faith can best be characterized in interpersonal family metaphors:
1. husband (God) - wife (Israel)
2. parent (God) - child (Israel)

C. YHWH has chosen to deal with fallen humanity through promise, sacrifice, and covenant. On the human side these involve personal trust and covenantal obedience.

D. Covenantal disobedience results in judgment. Judgment is always for the purpose of restoration (cf. Hos. 1:10-2:1; 2:14-23; 3:1-5; 11:8-11; 14:1-7). Discipline is an act of parental love (Heb. 12:5ff). Israel's future blessings are conditioned on her current obedience.

IX. THE HEBREW TEXT OF HOSEA

The text of Hosea is the most disputed in the OT (see NET Bible, p. 1557, #1). I am certainly not a Hebrew scholar, but I do bring other strengths (insights) into the interpretive process.

The state of the Hebrew text is partly due to the emotion of Hosea's writing and partly to its poetic form (genre). His metaphors are fresh and varied. This has caused problems for readers/scribes, both ancient and modern. The poetic nature, though difficult lexically, makes the natural parallelism a means of understanding lines of poetry even if the original text or lexical forms are lost. No major truth is irreparably lost because of the parallelism and the recurrent pattern of truths.

Textual emendation is helpful (and necessary), but must always remain speculative. Here is where the variety of ancient versions is helpful in seeing how other ancient interpreters have seen these disputed lines of poetry.

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